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ABSTRACT

Three papers describe parent and staff resources from the Macomb (Illinois) 0-3 Regional Project, a home based program for rural handicapped and high risk infants and toddlers. The development of toy workshops to help parents construct materials for their children is described. Two bibliographies are presented. The first, intended for parents, provides approximately 70 citations on activity ideas, general infant development, techniques, and specific handicapping conditions. The second bibliography, intended for staff members in parent infant programs, provides approximately 60 citations on curriculum, evaluation, child growth and general development, general early childhood, handicapping conditions, educational programing for the severely and profoundly handicapped, infant development, and working with parents. (CL)

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BABY BUGGY PAPER NO. 201

Toy Workshops for Parents: Bridging a Gap

by

Patricia L. Hutinger, Ed.D. and Nancy McKee

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A toy-making workshop is an example of a successful activity involving parents. It has been instrumental in bridging the gap between parents and professionals. Details of how to conduct such a workshop and suggestions for activities are contained in this paper.

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Parents are a key to successful work with little children. Yet sometimes it is hard for teachers and other professionals to find ways to bridge the gap with parents. One almost sure-fire way to do it is with a toy-making workshop. If you offer a wooden toy project option as part of the workshop, both fathers and mothers are likely to come. You might want to try it.

Here's how one group, the Macomb 0-3 Regional Project, a rural child/parent service, does it. The major goal of this federally funded project is working with handicapped and high risk children under three years of age, and their parents. Because the project staff believes that parents must be involved in every way in the development of their young children, parents participate in home visits, sharing centers, and even swimming sessions. Coming together in an activity-based workshop, however, is a highly successful aspect of the project. Parents gain skills to help themselves and their children. Families on limited budgets are able to make toys for less money than it would cost to buy them. More than that, they have fun in the process!

A toy workshop takes some careful planning. You need to find out what kinds of toys your parents are interested in making for their children. The Macomb 0-3 Project has developed a booklet of toys and patterns, You Can Make It: You Can Do It, which includes directions and patterns for simple wooden toys, blocks, stuffed toys, mobiles, a kick pillow for infants, and toys made from inexpensive materials. You can also collect patterns for toys from various magazines and craft books, but don't choose too many for your first attempt.

The staff of the Macomb Project chose four toy-making activities for their first workshop on the basis of their observations of the children's interest in the selected toys. The projects chosen were wooden cars, books made from magazine pictures and clear contact paper, crocheted granny-square stuffed blocks, and initted balls. (The crocheted blocks and knitted balls are easy to grasp for some of the physically handicapped children in the project.) The most popular toy, in terms of the parents' obvious choice, was the wooden car, an assembly-line project developed by Mr. Ron Barker, a university faculty member in Industrial Technology.

As parents begin to know you better, they will make suggestions about things they would like to learn to make. If your staff does not have the necessary expertise, you can usually find a mother or father who has, or you might ask an industrial arts or home economics teacher in your high school. Sometimes high school students can be of help, although they will probably need some guidance from you in working with the parents.

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Taking your cue from what you know the children like and what the parents express interest in is important in choosing activities. Another matter to be considered is time; the projects should be simple enough so that they can be completed during the evening or finished later at home without much extra work or materials.

Since fathers are more likely to be available in the evening, you should probably schedule your workshop for a week night. The Macomb Project schedules their workshops from 7:00 until 9:00 p.m., though parents are often still there finishing up a project at 10:00 p.m. They use an industrial arts room in a local school when the workshops involve wooden toys; however, almost any large space in a school, church, or community building could be used.

Three weeks ahead of time a letter is drafted to parents in the Macomb Project, telling them about the coming workshop. The first time, a map was drawn showing them how to find the building and the room, since many of the parents were from nearby communities. A tear-off sheet at the bottom of the letter lists toy-making choices so that the staff can get some idea of the number of parents interested in the various projects. This helps the staff determine the amount of materials to purchase. During the weeks between the time the letters had been delivered and the night of the workshop, staff members talk about the coming event and pick up the parents' response sheets.

Then the staff does more detailed planning, ranging from time schedules to arranging for who will meet the parents at the door, what materials need to be purchased, and how best to set up the room. Assignments are made according to the staff members' various talents. For the first workshop, one person volunteered to work with the granny square crocheted blocks, while another said she would help make the books; a third volunteered for the knitted ball activity. The workshops are family projects for both parents and project staff. One staff member's husband helped make books, while another took pictures. The project secretary videotaped activities during the first workshop.

On the first workshop a staff member worked with Mr. Barker to develop a list and purchase needed materials. She bought varnish, two grades of pine (1" x 4" x 8'), 1/4" dowels, and Elmer's glue. The wheels were scraps cut from previous projects of college students. (It is often possible to use lumber yard scraps if amounts needed are not too great.) Mr. Barker made three different jigs for various sawing and drilling procedures. These were attached to work tables. The day of the workshop, files, sandpaper, safety glasses, and pre-cut wheels were arranged for easy access. (This is possible when the workshop occurs on an evening of a day when the school has not been in session; otherwise, after-school set-up would be necessary.)

For the Macomb Project's first workshop, all materials were furnished by the project. Yarn, stuffing, crochet hooks, knitting needles, magazines, and clear contact paper were provided. Other workshops require different kinds of materials. Parents might bring the materials they need with them if careful planning is done and materials listed for each toy activity.

Nutritious snacks were planned and served by the staff, with recipes for everyone to take home. Apples, cheese, protein cookies, oatmeal cookies, finger gelatin, and fruit juice, along with coffee and tea, were available throughout the evening.

When the night of the first workshop arrived, everything was ready. Activities had been set up ahead of time in small areas, arranged in an inviting way, much as teachers set up learning centers in a classroom. Parents came first to the project office, had time to look at materials available there, and were greeted by another staff member, who also gave them name tags. Slides of their children involved in various activities from pudding painting to physical therapy were being shown. Since they had never seen the slides, parents spent a lot of time in the beginning watching, with comments coming fast. "Oh, there's Cindy!" "That's the time they played with the blocks." In some cases, the parents had not known each other until the workshop. The setting provided a relaxed way in which to get acquainted. Parents were free to come and go in the slide area.

The most popular activity at the first workshop was making the wooden cars. Saws, drilling, careful sanding, and applying a final coat of clear, non-toxic spray involved varying amounts of time. Some mothers were apprehensive about using power equipment, but found drilling the holes for wheels to be an exhilarating experience. Some parents made more than one wooden car, depending on the number of children they had at home. Smiles and jokes abounded. Fathers spent time looking around the room at the various machines and equipment, talking about them. They seemed quite comfortable. The workshop atmosphere was relaxed and easy-going, and helped establish greater feelings of mutual trust and empathy between project staff and parents.

Some parents learned to crochet or knit for the first time while others made several cars. Three hours after she had begun, one mother triumphantly finished a book and her wooden car. She was pleased to take home both the book and the car to her children.

The first workshop sponsored by the Macomb 0-3 Regional Project was a success. Parents wondered aloud "when the next one would be held." Other activities for possible workshops include making and binding simple books, making simple wooden puzzles and blocks, sewing stuffed cloth texture blocks (toweling,

satin, velveteen), making large stuffed toys (sewing machines must be available), making texture quilts, learning to make recipes for finger paint and play dough, and constructing mobiles from boxes, tiny bottles, and other "junk." The making of toys together for use in the home has been found to be an excellent bridge between parents and professionals. Ideas for activities for these workshops are only as limited as your imagination!

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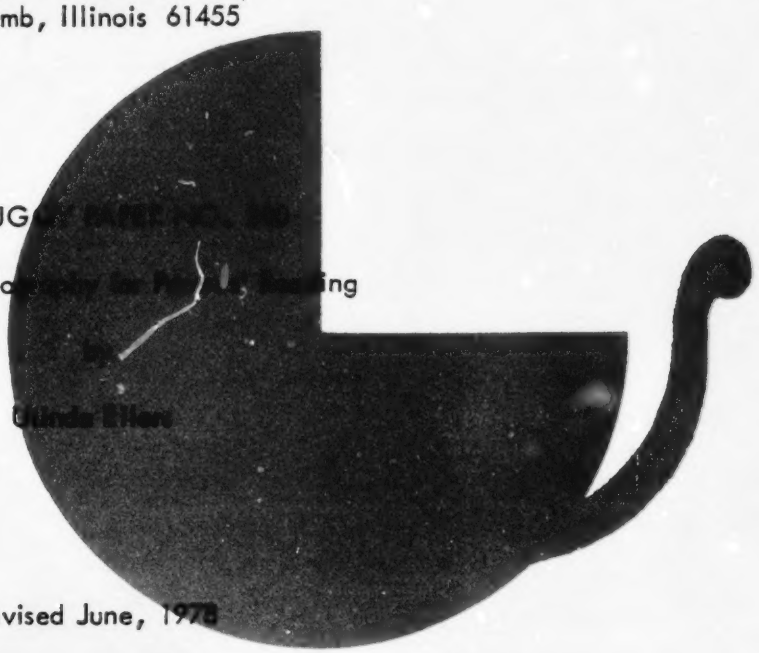

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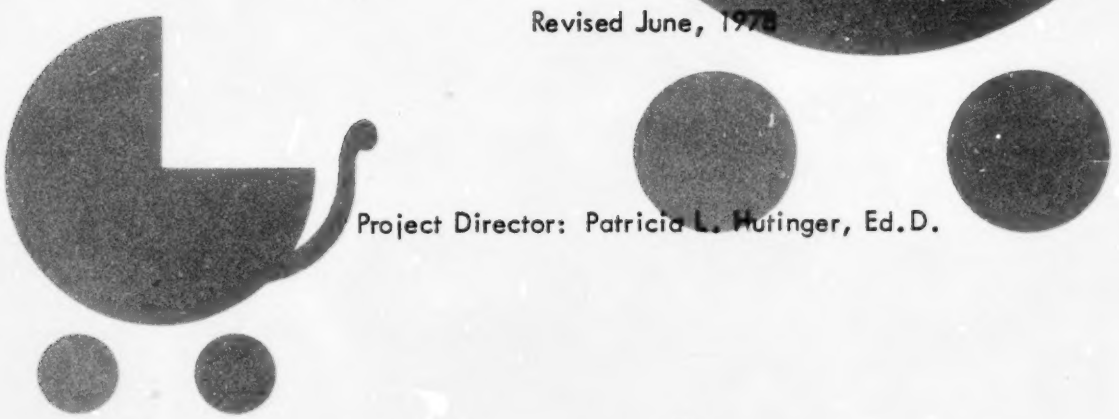

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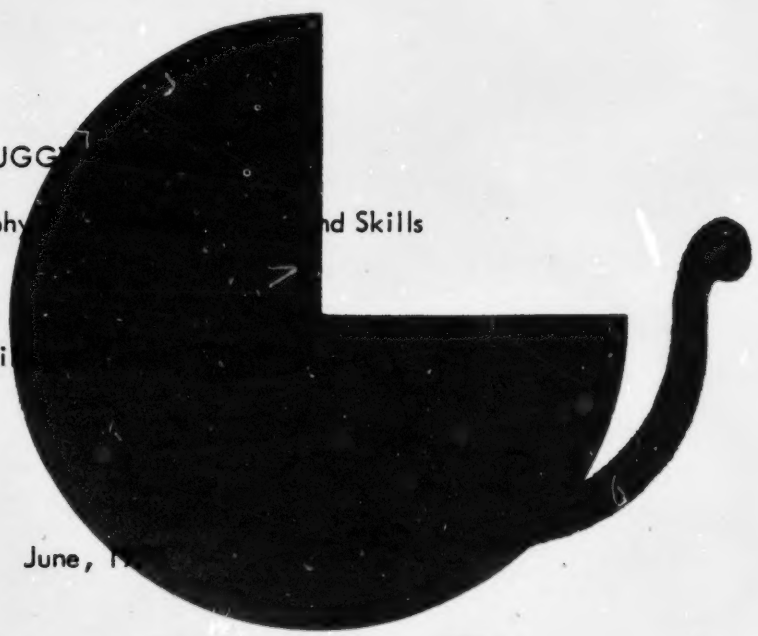

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